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## News

Tuesday, November 28, 2006

# Burr Oak couple follows long road to make their family complete

By Audora Burg

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Editor's note:

This is the first in a three-part series about adoption. Tuesday from grandparents to parents a Sturgis couple adopts six grandchildren.

BURR OAK ... #8221; People who see 9 1/2-month-old



Todd and Angie Frohriep of Burr Oak cuddle with their daughter, Jenna, during her brief nap. They began the process to adopt Jenna the day after she was born; the adoption was finalized Oct. 9. "As far as adoption, this is what everybody hopes for - no resistance, healthy baby, happy baby," Todd said.

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Jenna Frohriep of Burr Oak often comment that she looks just like her mother or her 8-year-old twin brothers.

Any resemblance is coincidental. Jenna was adopted.

Todd and Angie Frohriep's four-year wait for their daughter involved far more time and emotional ups and downs than would accompany any pregnancy.

The Frohrieps were already the parents of twin boys when they decided they wanted another child. After suffering two miscarriages, they thought, "Well, this route isn't the way to go."

They decided to explore adoption, but weren't sure where to start.

"We had no experience ...#8221; it was kind of a stab in the dark," Todd said. "We wanted to try, but didn't know how to go about it."

Initial research turned up an international program through Colombia, South America.

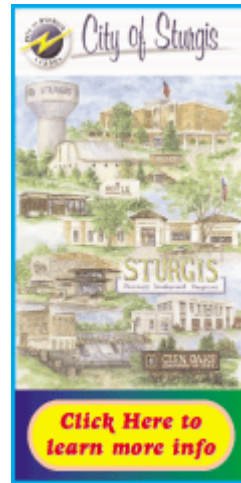
After more than a year's worth of paperwork and waiting, they became frustrated with that process. To actually adopt a child would require a six-week residency in Colombia, which would be logistically challenging as well as expensive.

"Where can you just stop and take a six-week vacation?" he asked. "There's no end to what you're spending. We were ready to take that road, but it was just a heck of a load to take on."

They ended that pursuit and took a break in their adoption quest, to reevaluate their options. After time and thought, they decided they would try to adopt more locally.

That initial foray was not wasted time; the Frohrieps had established a connection with Morning Star Adoption Center in Southfield, a Detroit-area agency that was their liaison with the international program.

They also made a key decision: "Since we're doing this, we'll wait for a girl," Angie said.



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This would prolong their wait: the agency could only show the Frohriebs' profile to women who knew they were having a girl, and many birth mothers picked the adoptive families early on, before they knew the child's sex.

The Frohriebs decided the unknown wait was worth it.

"We had two boys, two male dogs, two male cats, and me," Todd said. "Angie said 'if I could just get a little pink in the house,'" he said. She even joked about having to put a bow on the cat.

Eighteen months later, in January 2006, during which circumstances had prevented one placement, the agency called with the news they had been matched with a pregnant woman whose baby was due in May.

Their hopes lived for six days but were dashed the seventh, when the agency notified them that a paperwork error had matched two families with one baby, and the Frohriebs were the second family.

When the agency called Angie's cell phone at 4 p.m. the following day, she thought, "Oh, that's nice, they're calling to see how we're dealing with the disappointment."

Instead, it was the news they had been waiting for: a baby girl had been born that day in a Detroit-area hospital. She was theirs, if they wanted.

"Angie had given me that call that it didn't work out so many times, I couldn't even switch gears that fast," Todd said. "She had called the day before, with hopes let down and crushed. To go from that to the next day - I was really worried for Angie at that point. How is she even comprehending that?" he said.

"We didn't think of saying no, but we still had to make decisions," Angie said.

The baby was at least 10 weeks premature, possibly as many as 12. The birth mother had had little to no prenatal care. Although the agency would later get a brief health history, there were no guarantees the

woman was telling the truth, Angie said.

The Frohrieps took off for the hospital first thing the next morning. It was the first of 9,000 miles' worth of trips they would make over the next six weeks, until the baby was mature enough to be discharged.

"It was Superbowl weekend, we were supposed to get that big storm. We got going and got back early enough that we beat the storm," Angie said.

Before Todd and Angie left the hospital that day, they had named the baby, Jenna, and signed papers giving them temporary custody. That was the start of the 21-day waiting period during which the birth mother could change her mind.

The birth mother never saw the baby and had checked herself out of the hospital as soon as she was physically able.

"The adoption agency was in communication with her. She never said one word to give them an inkling she would change her mind," Todd said.

By the end of February, the birth mother's rights were officially terminated and they began a six-month waiting period before the adoption could be finalized.

Even though Jenna was on the way to officially being theirs, she was still in the hospital. Angie drove up to see their fragile little one every other day; Todd joined her on weekends.

"At first, where there wasn't a wire, there was tape," Angie said.

"There was very little skin to touch," Todd said.

When Angie held her for the first time at 1 1/2 weeks, it took 10 minutes for nurses to get the wires and leads sorted out and fed through the hole in the isolette.

"She (Angie) just had to be there, waiting with arms up. She couldn't just pick her up and turn around and sit down," Todd said.

Todd and Angie saw progress with every visit.

"I usually saw huge jumps - either another tube was gone, or half the amount of tape," Todd said. "At first, they told us maybe four weeks in the hospital," Todd said. But the nurses didn't really know. "She could have been there a lot longer."

But she was in good hands.

"She had people looking out for her before we got involved," Todd said. One nurse in particular took a "keen liking" to the baby and was very protective of her.

The Frohrieps learned from the nurses that even being matched with this baby was an unlikely event. This hospital usually contacted Catholic Social Services when an infant was surrendered; for some unknown reason, in this case, the social worker called Morning Star.

"As far as adoption, this is what everybody hopes for: no resistance, healthy baby, happy baby," Todd said.

The adoption was finalized Oct. 9; the Frohrieps were notified the following week.

"We got a notice in the mail - a plain manila envelope from the court," Angie said. "Well, here it is," she thought.

Someday, when the time is right, they will tell Jenna she is adopted, "probably when she's pretty young, so it's not such a shock. I think little doses right along," Todd said.

"We are her real parents - maybe not biologically," Todd said. "We don't make it a point to say she's adopted. Our goal is to be a family. She's just ours," he said.

Angie echoed that.

"I really feel like this was a meant-to-be," she said.

"We're at the point where we want to put that part (road to adoption) behind us and just be a family."

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